

**Remarks by Michael Casserly, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools
At
Press Conference on Urban NAEP 2009 Math Results
December 8, 2009**

Thank you. I am Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools. I am pleased to join this distinguished panel this morning.

Before I begin, I want to thank David Driscoll, David Gordon, and Cornelia Orr and their teams at the National Assessment Governing Board; John Easton and his staff at the Institute of Education Sciences; and Stuart Kerachsky, Peggy Carr and their teams at the National Center for Education Statistics.

It is an honor to work with you on this important project. Thank you for the great job you do.

I also want to take a second to summarize why we initiated this trial urban district assessment in November 2000.

1. We—as urban school systems—wanted to make it crystal clear that we were fully committed to the highest academic standards for our children.
2. We wanted to be able to compare ourselves with those with many of the same challenges.

3. Finally, we wanted a way to gauge our progress and evaluate our reforms in ways that the current 50 state assessment system does not allow.

I am repeating these reasons today because people often forget how serious we are about improving student achievement in our urban schools.

I want to call your attention to the Large Central City variable in the report being released today and make a number of quick points about the overall progress urban schools have made.

First, the data are clear in showing that large central city school students made statistically significant gains in both fourth and eighth grade math since the last testing in 2007--even as trends among fourth graders nationwide were flat.

Second, the data are also clear that the large central cities have made statistically significant gains in both the fourth and eighth grade since we began this testing in math in 2003.

In fact, the number of large central city students scoring at the proficient level or better on math has increased by 45 percent among fourth graders and 50 percent among eighth graders since 2003.

Third, the data are clear that we are catching up with the nation. Between 2003 and 2009, our large central city

schools have narrowed the gap with the nation by 20 percent in both fourth and eighth grades.

The gains are evident however one looks at the data.

We have made progress since 2007. We've made progress since 2005. And we've made progress since 2003.

We have made progress on scale scores. We have made progress on achievement levels.

We have made progress on the number of students scoring at or above basic. We have made progress on the number of students scoring at or above proficiency.

And we have decreased the number of urban students scoring below basic levels by 24 percent.

Our gains are statistically significant and educationally significant. Maybe politically significant as well.

If you look solely at any two-year testing cycle in any individual city, subject or grade, the results are sometimes messier and it can lead one to believe that there has been no progress. You see arrows going up, down, and sideways. But if you stand back from the individual trees, you will see a forest that is growing taller and getting stronger.

One of our fastest growing trees is the District of Columbia Public Schools. We are very proud of Michelle Rhee and her district's improvements, and would

underscore that gains of this magnitude do not happen by accident. They happen because there are real reforms underneath them.

Conversely, we are profoundly troubled by the scores in Detroit. That district's performance was an outrage and should not be allowed to stand. We have met with city leaders and urged them in the strongest possible terms to completely overhaul how the community educates its children.

Urban schools in general, however, are getting better. And we are determined to make them better still.

We are encouraged by the new results but we are not satisfied with them. We know we need to accelerate. And we know that our gaps are still too wide.

But these NAEP data give us the tools we need to ask hard questions about our instructional practices. We are nearly done with a ground-breaking project looking at why some TUDA districts improve faster than others. And the results are giving us even greater confidence that urban education in this nation can be substantially improved.

And that's the point behind all the numbers. It is why we volunteered in the first place. So we could tell what was working and what wasn't. So we could raise the quality of public education in our Great Cities. So we could give our kids—the kids that America too often overlooks—a shot at the American dream.

We have a long way to go. But, the status quo in urban public education has ended. And it is being replaced by progress.

Thank you.